

L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht presents:

Ken Lum

“Rorschach Shopkeeper Works”

October 26 to December 31, 2007

You and your friends are cordially invited to the opening on Friday, October 26 from 7 p.m.

This text is a summary of a review by Martina Koppel-Yang and an interview between her and Ken Lum in June 2007 at the occasion of his first exhibition in Beijing.

Based on his earlier Shopkeeper Series – signs in which a permanent half of a petit-bourgeois commercial sign is juxtaposed with a provisional message in temporary and movable lettering – Lum here references the identity-constituting “conflict between instrumentality and desire, as crystallized in the message and visual presence of the signs.”

Facing cultural and political assimilation, “the individual is confronted with his emotional functioning within the sign system of capitalist logic,” according to Lum. Considering this conflict part of the process of the individual's emancipation and his quest for autonomy, the shop-sign itself becomes the symbol and

scene of this process. By transforming the signs into the image of a psychoanalytic method, the artist subjects the sign itself to a psychoanalytic interrogation: its identity is defined as split, as evident in the visually disjunctive and mirrored structure. “Bonivino,” “Action Lock,” “Cambie Plumbing” or “Handy Appliance” become epitomes of self-encounter and self-definition.

The ambivalence of the quest for autonomy again becomes evident: Is it possible to frame one's identity aside from dominant thought patterns and dis-



courses, is it possible that art defines itself aside the logic of the market, or is, as Ken Lum asks, “the quest for autonomy only an ideological device and maybe “anti-revolutionary in the sense that it acts as a repository for avant-garde art as one stage in the assimilative and acculturative process of art into art history?”

Asked how he chose the signs he used for Rorschach Shopkeeper Works, Ken Lum answered: “I like the effect of deferment in art such that there can be a misrecognition, no matter how temporary, in terms of the question of art and non-art. In terms of the Rorschach works, I take an already existing sign and I alter it such that

ness information. The second part permits the entry of voice, that of the imagined proprietor. I tried to make the works such that the second part creates a tension in combination with the first part; the second part imparts the subjectivity of the proprietor which may contravene the impersonal nature of business and the quest of making money.”

Asked about the importance of identity in his works, he replied:

“Identity is a recurring issue in my work, that is true. It is a natural interest given my context, to which you allude in your question. But beyond my own interest, it is perhaps the central issue confronting many people today, as identity gives people a sense of place



the effect of it being halved and reversed or quartered creates a look in which the originating parts are somehow defused of their purpose. The signs are not necessarily split at the halfway point, but at a point whereby a Rorschach effect is maximized.”

And about differences to the earlier “Shopkeeper Series,” he explained:

“The previous series were structured in two parts, with one part permanent and the second part provisional. The permanent part is the more monolithic and declarative in terms of its announcement of the business and general busi-

and being in the world. This is so, no matter that identity is often a gnarled and changing term. I think it is also a key and recurring issue in art, if not the key issue. After all, what is art if it is not about an expression of who we are as subjects in the world?

Canada-based Ken Lum has developed a large and complex body of work of great critical relevance, including photography, photographic por-

trait-logos, language paintings, and mirror works. His oeuvre focuses on the notion of identity, on its construction, space and politics. Lum has participated in many important international art exhibitions including the Documenta XI (2002), the Shanghai Biennial (2000), the Sydney Biennial, Carnegie International, the Sao Paulo Biennial, the Venice Biennial and the Johannesburg Biennial. He is also an active writer and founding editor of Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art. He further curated major exhibitions, both historical and contemporary: the 2004 NorthWest Annual exhibition held at the Center of Contemporary Art in Seattle, Shanghai Modern: 1919 - 1945 for the Museum Villa Stuck in Munich,



co-curator of Sharjah Biennial 7, held in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, the Dubai Biennial.

Ken Lum's oeuvre as an artist and as a writer touches through its honesty and rigor. The artist eliminates the distance between life and art not only on an aesthetical, but also on an existential level. Similar to the Rorschach Shopkeeper Works, where the question of the self-definition of the individual is linked to the issues of autonomy and independence of thought pattern and systems, Lum connects the query for the relevance of art in contemporary society to his personal life.

In his speech at the 2006 Sydney Biennial he asked if there was not more to art. He defined the artist as a person who is in a "constant search for meaning," who looks for that what "is missing," and said that "there can be no progress (real, that is, moral) except in the individual and by the individual himself."

Images: Page 1: „Cam“, 2007, approx. 123 x 170 cm; Page 2: „Tire“, 2007, approx. 118 x 146 cm; page 3: „Palace“, 2007, approx. 147 x 170 cm, pages 1-3, Silkscreen print on fabric, aluminium
Page 4: „Cambie Plumbing“, 2007, Silkscreen print on Plexiglas, aluminium, ca. 220 x 280 cm



PREVIEW

Exhibitions

- Tracey Moffatt / John Hilliard: *True Romance*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna 5.Oct.2007— 3. Feb.2008
- Liu Ding und Naoya Hatakeyama: *Thermocline of Art, New Asian Waves*, Z KM Karlsruhe, 15 Jun.—21 Oct .2007
- Liu Ding: *China Power Station: Part II*, Astrup Fernley Museet for Modern Kunst, Oslo, Norway, 8 Sep. - Dec. 2 2007
- Ken Lum: Istanbul Biennial, Sept 8—Dec. 12 2007
- Tracey Moffatt: *All.Inclusive—Die Welt des Tourismus*, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany, Jan. 1—May 2,

2008

Art Fairs:

- ARCO, Madrid, Spain 13. – 18. Februar 2008

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